

NONVIOLENCE, A WEAPON FOR THE STRONG.

Introduction

Previous peacebuilding studies have mainly focused on violent conflicts ignoring peaceful ones which have been a minor sideline. Peace research is therefore a new academic field in peace and conflict studies. The practice of nonviolence has on the other hand developed a lot over the last 100 years (Johansen cited in Webel and Galtung 2009: 143). Mahatma Karamchand Gandhi well known as the father of nonviolence used the concept *ahimsa* translated as nonviolence to express that nonviolence is not a question of physical actions but a principle guiding humans in their thoughts, words and deeds. Today, non violent techniques are used in most social and political movements, peace organisations and other parts of the civil society, they are used regularly to promote their ideas and struggle for their causes. Nonviolent actions are used either to create wider support for their goals, to directly reach their aims, or in order to prevent their opponents from achieving theirs (Johansen cited in Webel and Galtung 2009: 148). The most influential use of non violence in recent decades is evident in political revolutions since the 1980's. This paper is based on discussing the nuanced views of nonviolence explaining how non violence is a preferred option to violence in conflict resolution.

Brief overview on nonviolence

Conflict is an inevitable nature humankind. Conflicts will occur as people pursue both liberty and security, both private property and distributive justice. Any use of violence to pursue human needs and rights of one person or group harms and obstructs the rights of others (Schirch 2004: 16). A nonviolent resistance is a civilian-based method used to wage conflict through social psychological, economic, and political means without the threat or use of violence. It includes acts of omission, acts of commission, or a combination of both. Hence non violence is not a technique that is action passive but action nonviolent (Sharp 2005: 15) aimed at raising awareness and balancing power (Schirch 2004: 28).

Historical studies on nonviolence struggles reveal that a number of liberation struggles for national self determination might not have necessarily been won through violence. Sharp (2005: 15) posits that, nonviolence struggles have occurred in widely differing cultures, periods of history, and political conditions. While to some societies nonviolence has been called a weapon for the poor for example in Latin America (Schirch 2004: 29),

it has occurred in industrialized countries, has been practiced under constitutional democracies and against empires, foreign occupations and dictatorial systems (Sharp 2005: 16). Sharp's philosophy just like Ghandhi's Satyagraha principle disregards the claims of nonviolence conflict resolution critics, who have always believed that violence is an indispensable weapon to win freedom from foreign subjugation. They tend to ignore the pivotal role that non-violent civilian-led resistance played in many national quests for liberations and positive social change. Examples of nonviolence successes include; the Liberation struggle spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi in India in 1930, against extreme dictatorship of both the Nazi and Communist systems in Europe, the anti apartheid struggle in South Africa in 1994, the Holocaust in Berlin, ousting the Guatemalan dictator in 1944, among others. Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. argued that peace cannot be achieved through violence; there must be harmony between the means used to attain an end (Schirch 2004: 29).

Methods of non-violent struggle

Scholars have identified at least 198 specific methods of nonviolent struggle. According to (Sharp 2013: 21-43), these constitute three main types of activity;

- *Non-cooperation:* This can be political, economic or social acts of omission where people refuse to continue the usual forms of cooperation as a way to resist another group. Non cooperation is an effective method because naturally it is more disruptive of the existing relationships and the operating system than the other methods. Examples of non-cooperation can be drawn from the Ghana independence, whereby protestors used boycotts and strikes, nationwide nonviolent sit-down-at-home strikes and student strikes. People realised that cooperation with the colonialists reinforces subjection and so they had to do something about their plight but using nonviolent means. Determination was done through a variety of associations and a willingness to accept imprisonment. Others can include political defiance as was apparent in India's resistance against the British rule and apartheid.
- *Non violent intervention:* This strategy may actively lead to the disruption of the normal operation of policies or the system by deliberate interference, either psychologically, economically, socially or politically. It aims at disrupting the status quo and draws attention to violence as a away to mobilise people for change. It includes; psychological intervention by use of fasts, danger to pressure people's moral

systems; physical intervention involves sitting, standing, lying down, singing, or doing some action as a way to invade and occupy public space; social intervention includes group meetings, internet networking, public drama and theatre; economic intervention includes non violent seizure of assets and land; political intervention includes seeking imprisonment, overloading government facilities among others.

- *Protest and Persuasion*: These are forms of activity in which practitioners are expressing opinions , raise awareness of injustice and bring shame to perpetrators of violence through symbolic actions. These are public actions that show support or disapproval of an action, a policy, a group or a government. They include; public speeches through; written declarations/publications, group petitions, symbolic public acts; through lighting candles, torches or lanterns, group presentations, mock awards, mock elections, withdrawal and renunciations through walk outs, silence, processions through; marches or parades among others.

These and many other methods can be applied in a non violence resistance against any oppressive rule without having to use violence. Activities to wage conflict nonviolently ideally ripen the conditions for transforming relationships and structures unlike use of violence. In many cases this is essential where structures resist change, and where people in power may ignore pleas for dialogues or negotiations (Schirch 2004: 32). The section below addresses how the use of violence to gain justice may cause more harm than good.

Savagery begets savagery

Using violence to gain justice is dangerous to mankind because of the further damages this kind of violence ensues. In pursuing justice under peacebuilding, the concept of "justpeace" recognises that justice pursued violently only begets further injustice (reference). Nonviolence as a means to conflict resolution is a process and if strategically planned, will always reap positive results. It has worked before in the most dictatorial governments and hence can be applied in other cases. However for this to happen, a strategic planning must be carried out as Sharp (2002, 2005 and 2013) says. The section below gives a brief overview about strategic nonviolence. Using violence even against the dictators/ brute rulers is politically deficient because the results are based on fear which is not only debasing but also fragile. Many of the victims of violence seek ways to gain strength and confront their opponents. But more than that, violence will not disappear when one's opponents have been defeated. This is because violence begets

violence. For example, if victory is won through murderous acts against the opponent, still the rulers in the new regime will be murderers, hence the people would gain nothing but violence from their leaders. Therefore, if violence was to be used against the British, it would only be mirroring the actions of their opponents.

Strategic Planning for a nonviolent action

Nonviolent action is a means of combat, as is war and it involves the matching of forces and the waging of "battles," requires wise strategy and tactics, and demands of its "soldiers" courage, discipline, and sacrifice (Sharp: 1990: 9). Sharp reiterates that people seeking victory by nonviolent struggle need to increase their basic strength, to apply skilfully their chosen technique of action, and to fulfil its requirements for success to the maximum of their capacity. According to Schirch (2004: 28), strategic nonviolence is a set of approaches that works for change by escalating the conflict without using violence. Sharp (2005: 103), gives a valid example on strategic nonviolence against British resistance in India in 1930: Gandhi's programme of resistance against the repressive rule of the British was developed tactfully in such a way that new persons were to be selected to replace resisters when they were arrested. A sense of an Indian identity was created through a method of non cooperation and defiance. The cooperation among the protestors was an important aspect as Gandhi elaborated thus, "we are men and women, we are courageous, smart and deadly serious. If you arrest us, more will follow until you can't arrest us all. If you fail to arrest us, then you will be forced to stand by helplessly while we kick out one of the main supporters of your regime. Either way we do not fear you" (Ackerman and Kruegler 1994: 173).

However in cases where people are faced with a situation which needs an immediate response, non-violent action will occur spontaneously. This nature does not allow time for planning; something has to be done immediately. An example is the protest in 1943 by non-Jewish German women whose Jewish husbands had been arrested by the Nazis and who were about to be sent to concentration camps. Also, a less immediate but still largely unplanned 'campaign' was that of Norwegian teachers' resistance to Nazi interference in the education system.

Nonviolence in un-civilised societies

Political defiance against dictatorship means that the population is no longer intimidated by the violent repressive leadership. However, to take action against the dictator, a carefully laid out plan is needed for a nonviolent action to be successful. Sharp (2012: 53 - 66) posits that a political defiance campaign against dictatorship needs comprehensive strategic planning because of the dangers that may be involved. He adds, "disciplined, courageous non violent resistance in the face of dictators' brutalities may induce unease, disaffection, unreliability, and in extreme situations even mutiny among the dictators' own soldiers and population". In addition, persistent use of political defiance may gain public popularity through increased public participation in resistance of autocratic rule.

The nonviolence resistance in Denmark and Norway against the Nazi occupations and cases of resistance in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in which there were violations of rules of war dealing with resisting populations (Stratford 1987: 50). The Jews were advocating for a right to live and doing so in dignity and in freedom. According to Sharp, the efforts of the Danes to oppose the Germany occupation rule were improvised (without prior advanced preparations or training or even had less knowledge of nonviolent techniques), yet they succeeded with some modest but significant victories. The Danes applied a non violent cooperation through social boycotts, resistance of the Germans in public spaces, among other methods. The attack of the Jews of Denmark was regarded by the Danes as an assault on the very fabric of the Danish Society and thus on their national pride and integrity (Stratford 1987: 51). According to (Juergensmeyer 2005: 104), in such extreme situations, vengeance is more superior than passive and helpless submission.

In Norway, the noncooperation method applied gained success after the Norwegian teachers had refused to cooperate with plans to introduce a fascist teachers organization. The success in Norway was attributed to many factors including; their democratic outlook and institutions, solidarity of social classes, contribution of individualism which stemmed from their high standard of education and long traditions of freedom from war and peaceful resolution of domestic differences. Therefore, these two nonviolent struggles show a great milestone in the history of nonviolence against ruthless dictators because even amidst absence of preparation and training, they still achieved their goals.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, one can strongly assert that nonviolent discipline is a key to success and must be maintained despite provocations. Sharp argues that, "we do not have to choose between destructive war and passive submission to tyranny. There is another nonviolent struggle" (Sharp 2003: 4). Nonviolent resistance methods are more successful than violent ones in achieving strategic objectives. However, for any society to change into a non violent one, it is necessary to change the attitudes and principles of individuals, social structure and political power. This kind of transformation is vital for a successful nonviolent fight. This presents a challenge to academicians in peacebuilding and activists from all parts of human activities who must develop creativity and empathy to develop new nonviolent tools, and moreso test them in conflict situations for future use just like Ghandi did in his era.

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